

FIFTEENTH LEGISLATURE.

SKETCHES  
OF  
LEGISLATORS  
AND  
STATE OFFICERS

1876-1878.

BY JOHN CARDWELL.

AUSTIN, TEXAS:  
DEMOCRATIC STATESMAN STEAM PRINT.  
1876.

## TWENTY-NINTH DISTRICT.

*Counties.*—Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, Zapata, Webb, Maverick, Kinney, Uvalde, Medina, Nueces, San Patricio, Live Oak, Frio, Duval, Encinal, McMullen, LaSalle, Dimmitt and Zavala.

SENATOR JOHN S. FORD, better known as Col. John S. Ford, or "Old Rip," was born in Greenville district, South Carolina, May 26, 1815. His father moved to Tennessee in 1817, in which State the subject of this sketch was raised. Early in 1836 Col. Ford raised a company to take part in the Texas revolution. He arrived in Texas in June of the same year, in advance of his men, settled in San Augustine, and soon went into the service, remaining in active duty during 1836, 1837-8-9. He was surveyor in 1838; surveyed

country around Marshall, Harrison county; was elected to the Congress of the Republic of Texas in 1844; introduced a resolution in 1845 to accept the terms of annexation; favored that measure on the ground that annexation was opposed by France and England, and that Texas ought to throw her weight in the scale of republicanism in a contest between monarchies and the United States.

Col. Ford settled at Austin in 1845; edited the *Texas Democrat*; took part in the Mexican war; was adjutant of Col. Jack Hays's regiment, and was recommended to the notice of the Secretary of War for gallant conduct at San Juan, Teotihuacan and Zacualtipan.

In 1849 he went with Major Neighbors to explore the route between Austin and El Paso; made a report of the trip and published a map; was mustered into service as captain of rangers by Lieut. Wood, in August of that year, and stationed between the Nueces and Rio Grande; fought the Indians above old Fort Ewell, near old Fort Merrill, and on the head waters of the Agua Dulce, in May, 1850. During the same year Lieut. Walker, of his company, fought the Indians on the Rio Grande, below Laredo, and Lieut.

Highsmith at San Antonio Viejo Wells. In 1851 Lieut. Walker had a fight on the Gato Creek, and Lieut. Burleson near old Fort Ewell. Besides these there were other affairs with the Comanches. His company did good service, and it was complimented in general orders by Gen. George M. Brooke, then commanding in Texas.

In 1852 he was elected to the State Senate to fill the unexpired term of Gen. Edward Burleson, who had just died. The same year he purchased *The Southwestern American*, and again assumed the role of editor. In 1853, in conjunction with Capt. Jo. Walker, he established *The State Times*, which was published until 1857.

In 1858 he was placed in command of the Texas State troops; made a campaign at the head of one hundred Americans and one hundred and eleven friendly Indians; encountered the Comanches on the South Canadian, May 12, routed them in two fights, killed 76, and lost two men; was again on the frontier in 1859, and in the latter part of the same year was sent to operate against Cortina on the Rio Grande; had charge of the advance guard, December 27, 1859; engaged Cortina

near Rio Grande City, with a force at least seven times his own, and routed him before the main body came up; pursued him fifteen miles, captured two pieces of artillery, and killed a large number of the enemy. He again defeated him in February, 1860, at La Bolsa, in Mexico. He had forty-seven men under fire, and Cortina between two hundred and fifty and three hundred; Cortina was covered by a fence built of logs, and by houses, yet he was dislodged and routed with heavy loss. Capt. Stoneman, now Gen. Stoneman, and Ford engaged Cortina again at La Mesa, and finally at his own rancho of Magote. The two last affairs drove him from the Rio Grande, and the Cortina war ended.

Col. Ford was a member of the Secession Convention in 1861, to which he was elected by the voters of Cameron county, of which he was not even a citizen. He had command of an expedition which landed at Brazos Santiago in February, 1861, and he studiously avoided a collision with the United States troops. He had fifteen hundred men, thrown together at a moment's notice, not well armed, and unused to war, and he felt convinced they would not be sure of success

in attacking a regular force with more than twenty pieces of artillery, and if war was to ensue he did not feel warranted in precipitating it with the chance of the *morale* of victory being against the South. He was elected colonel of the second Texas cavalry by the Texas convention. He had command of the military district of the Rio Grande, which extended from the mouth of that stream to El Paso, about one thousand miles, a portion of his force being State troops. Gen. John R. Baylor, as lieutenant-colonel of the regiment, did good service on the upper Rio Grande.

He was made commandant of conscripts in the latter part of 1862, and discharged the duties of the position with justice and leniency. He refused to place a Union man in the Confederate ranks as a matter of principle, and he left no resentments behind him. Late in 1863 he commenced organizing a force to make a campaign against the Federals, then occupying Brownsville, after having had several sharp contacts with the enemy, holding Brazos Island. On May 13, 1865, he engaged Col. Barrett, in command of the thirty-fourth Indiana, the sixty-second colored, and

a part of two other regiments, near the Palmito ranche. He had less than three hundred mounted men, and six pieces of artillery. Col. Barrett was defeated with loss, and pursued to within two miles of Brazos Island.

After the surrender he was made parole commissioner on the part of the Confederate States, and in that position he did all he could to help his companions in misfortune, and to keep them in the South, insisting that there was more chivalry in sharing the fortunes of those who were unable to leave the South than in seeking refuge in a foreign country, and that he had no future outside the United States.

In 1868 he was editor of the *Brownsville Sentinel*, and opposed Radical measures with zeal. He was a delegate to the Baltimore convention in 1872; and a member of the constitutional convention which met at Austin in September, 1875. He voted against several articles in the new constitution.

Col. Ford is now a member of the Texas Senate, to which position he was elected by a large majority. He is sixty-one years old, and has grand-children rapidly growing up

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to maturity. Yet he is erect, of strong constitution, and his mind is in its fullest vigor.